

seek another location that was more attractive.⁶⁸

In the 6 to 12 months preceding the 1898 election, various groups of men organized—the most prominent group became known as the “Secret 9” (as they were called by Harry Hayden). Others in more established factions such as the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce or Merchants Association also developed plans to achieve Democratic victory in concert with other factions.⁶⁹ For these men,

⁶⁸ As soon as the leaders of the coup regained control of the city, new business ventures emerged. Undoubtedly, the leaders promised investors that once the election was over, the city would be under their control and business could resume as it had been operating in the fifteen years prior to Fusion reforms that up-ended city politics in 1897. Key developments were the establishment of the headquarters for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad in 1900 and the construction of the Delgado Cotton Mill in 1899. Piedmont textile magnate Edwin C. Holt, who also had familial ties with Wilmington’s elite, constructed the textile mill in Wilmington. In February 1900, just after the mill opened, Holt stated that he “would not have invested his money nor advised his friends to do likewise had the political scene in Wilmington stayed under the same administration prior to November of 1898.” The mill cost \$300,000 to construct and in its first year it operated 440 looms, 10,300 spindles and could produce 25,000 yards of white cloth daily. By 1902 the mill employed 350 workers – all of them white, a fact common to the industry statewide. For more on the development of the Delgado Mill, see Rebecca Sawyer, “The Delgado-Spofford Textile Mill and Its Village: The Fabric of Wilmington’s 20th Century Landscape” (master’s thesis, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, 2001). Also Watson, *Wilmington, Port of NC*, 116-117; *Wilmington Messenger*, February 21, 1900.

⁶⁹ The Chamber of Commerce and the Merchant’s Association met regularly to discuss methods to improve their business options within the city. Further, these groups encouraged the growth of white labor unions that move to the front of the push for white labor over black in the months following the election and violence. The Chamber of Commerce issued multiple statements in the papers in support of the Democratic Party and its white supremacy tenets. On November 2, the Chamber of Commerce formally

political victory translated into economic stability and prosperity—factors lacking for them under Fusion rule. These men also facilitated the development of other organizations such as the White Government Union and Red Shirts in order to support the Democratic Party’s attempts to recapture state and local politics.⁷⁰

In the face of mounting opposition from the more organized Democratic Party, Populists and Republicans failed to mount a successful offensive. Beginning in 1897, irreparable splits developed among Fusionists, and within their respective

declared itself “against negro domination.” The Chamber issued a resolution which stated that it felt black/Republican rule in the city was “detrimental to every business interest, arrests enterprise, hampers commerce and repels capital which might otherwise find investment in our midst.” The Chamber concluded that “prosperity, peace and happiness” within Wilmington was not possible under the current regime. *Wilmington Messenger*, November 2, 1898.

⁷⁰ Several men were members of multiple groups that were all working toward the common goal of Democratic Party victory. The Secret Nine were J. Allan Taylor, Hardy Fennell, W. A. Johnson, L. B. Sasser, William Gilchrist, P. B. Manning, E. S. Lathrop, Walter Parsley, and Hugh MacRae. A second group, the Group of Six, also met and its members were William L. Smith, John Berry, Henry Fennell, Thomas Meares, William F. Robertson, and Walker Taylor. The Campaign Committee of the Democratic Party was Frank Stedman, Edgar Parmele, Walker Taylor, and George Rountree. The Chamber of Commerce featured James H. Chadbourne Jr. as President with members George Rountree, Thomas Strange, William R. Kenan, Thomas C. James, Walker Taylor, S. H. Fishblate, Frank Stedman, William E. Worth, Thomas Clawson, Walter Parsley, J. Allan Taylor, Hugh MacRae, John L. Cantwell, and Samuel Northrop. In her research on the Delgado Mill, Rebecca Sawyer discovered that in 1895 Wilmington’s leading businessmen issued a stock prospectus in favor of establishing a textile mill in the city after investigation into the matter. However, the men could not act on the prospectus because of the changes to city government wrought by Fusion reform. Hayden, *Wilmington Light Infantry*, 66-7, 72; Hayden, *Story of the Wilmington Rebellion*; Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 49; Sawyer, “Delgado-Spofford Mill.”